

CLAIMS:

1. Apparatus for covering an elongate opening having two rails each arranged along a respective side of the opening, the apparatus comprising:

5 a fabric sheet having a length to cover at least a part of the length of the opening and a width between two side edges to span the width between the rails;

each side edge of the sheet having therealong a respective support member arranged for engaging the respective rail so as to attach the side edge to the rail;

10 a carriage movable along the opening;

and a reel mounted on the carriage and arranged to roll the sheet and the two support members onto the reel and to un-roll the sheet and the two support members therefrom;

15 such that the sheet member can be unrolled from the reel by movement of the carriage longitudinally along the opening in one direction for deployment over the opening and can be rolled onto the reel by movement of the carriage longitudinally along the opening in an opposed direction for exposing the opening.

2. The apparatus according to claim 1 wherein the carriage has
20 wheels which are arranged to roll on the rails.

3. The apparatus according to Claim 1 wherein the carriage has guides for deploying the sheet.

4. The apparatus according to Claim 1 wherein the sheet is wider

than the rails and the guides are arranged to direct the support members from a wider position maintaining the sheet flat on the reel inwardly to the width of the rails as the sheet is deployed.

5 5. The apparatus according to Claim 1 wherein there is provided a plurality of longitudinally spaced supports each bridging between the support members for supporting the sheet between the support members.

6. The apparatus according to Claim 5 wherein the supports are arch members having each end attached to a respective one of the support members.

10 7. The apparatus according to Claim 6 wherein each arch member is flexible so as to move from a flat condition on the reel to an arched position between the support members.

8. The apparatus according to Claim 6 wherein carriage has a guide member between the support members for lifting the arch members from the flat condition as each is deployed to the upwardly bowed arched condition bridging the support members.

9. The apparatus according to Claim 6 wherein the sheet includes a plurality of longitudinally spaced transversely extending pockets, each for receiving a center portion of a respective one of the arch members.

20 10. The apparatus according to Claim 1 wherein each of the support members comprises a channel section having a base with two depending side walls for engaging over a respective one of the rails.

11. The apparatus according to Claim 1 wherein each of the support

members comprises a longitudinally continuous sheet edge mounting member and a plurality of separate rail engaging pieces which can flex each relative to the next.

12. The apparatus according to Claim 11 wherein the edge mounting member comprises a channel and a strip insert portion within the channel
5 which holds an edge strip of the sheet within the channel.

13. The apparatus according to Claim 1 wherein there is provided an arrangement for matching the wound diameter of the sheet and support members on the reel at the support members and at the center of the sheet.

14. The apparatus according to Claim 10 wherein the channel
10 section of each support member has the depending side walls thereof collapsible to the base for matching the wound diameter of the sheet and support members on the reel at the support members and at the center of the sheet.

15. The apparatus according to Claim 11 wherein the separate rail engaging pieces have curved front and rear edges.

16. Apparatus for composting waste materials comprising:
15 an elongate pit for receiving waste material to be composted arranged such that the material can be loaded into the pit for composting and removed from the pit when composting is complete;

two rails each arranged along a respective side of the opening;

20 a fabric sheet having a length to cover at least a part of the length of the opening and a width between two side edges to span the width between the rails;

each side edge of the sheet having therealong a respective support

member arranged for engaging the respective rail so as to attach the side edge to the rail;

a carriage movable along the opening;

and a reel mounted on the carriage and arranged to roll the sheet and
5 the two support members onto the reel and to un-roll the sheet and the two support members therefrom;

such that the sheet member can be unrolled from the reel by movement of the carriage longitudinally along the opening in one direction for deployment over the opening and can be rolled onto the reel by movement of the
10 carriage longitudinally along the opening in an opposed direction for exposing the opening.

17. The apparatus according to Claim 1 wherein there is provided a machine for acting on the material in the pit during composting, the machine being arranged to run along the rails behind the carriage as the cover sheet is removed
15 and rolled onto the reel and wherein there is provided a second fabric sheet on a second carriage arranged to follow the machine and deploy the second fabric sheet over the pit as the machine moves along the pit.

18. The apparatus according to Claim 16 wherein the carriage has wheels which are arranged to roll on the rails.

20 19. The apparatus according to Claim 16 wherein the carriage has guides for deploying the sheet.

20. The apparatus according to Claim 16 wherein there is provided a plurality of longitudinally spaced supports each bridging between the support

members for supporting the sheet between the support members.